

THE BENNIAD

written in the year MCMLXIX by Apoca Lypsia

Focus in now on the Bennium College community, cradled in the arms of the Verminn Mountains, where its expanded quota of 2000 women today occupies its mere one and a half acres of land. Let us join the stupenti as they engage in their daily routines. It is spring-time, so we will find them outside in their bikinis, lying in rows across the Commons Lawn like tightly packed sardines, their bodies profusely oiled. As the sun grows hotter toward mid-day, the oils form glistening droplets that float on the women's sweat. The sun, beatind down on the bodies, is reflected from one shining shape to another. The glare of moist bronze covers the Lawn like a burning lake. Now and then someone sluggishly rolls over making the flat sheet formed by the bodies blister and boil like molten lead. Erotica rolls too far to the left, bumping into Virginia, who in turn bumps into Chaotica, and the whole Lawn trembles like a mass of taut flesh.

As we approach Bennium from the direction of New Hades, the odor of warm humanity greets us. Arriving here we have left the city behind us. Here they live and learn close to Nature. The motto here is Intensity, the dirty word is Dabble. That is why they have reduced their curriculum to only one course. The name of the course is Introduction to Learning and is described in the college catalog ue as a course in "learning how to learn". Hence, by designing itself a curriculum markedly singular in nature, the Bennium community has ingeniously insured itself against Dilletantism. The content of the course varies from stupent to stupent. Not only is the subject matter different for each stupent, but it literally depends upon her, for Bennium is a school which holds the individual responsibility of the stupent as essential to her educational experience. The principle that underlies the educational philosophy is that of "matri-culation by concentration". In other words, since there is only one course, there is no need to register or to make decisions as to instructors (for the cistinction between faculti and stupenti has long vanished from the face of the campus). All in all, the institution has managed to do away with the red tape and formalities of Academia, to eliminate Bureaucracy and to become the truly American, truly democratic and truly Femininefree-institution. Besides these items, Bennium has also gotten rid of books, paper, writing utensils, desks and all other objects which formerly stood as barriers to a true communion between the stupent and her work.

All educational philosophies are premised on the principle of Mind over Matter, but the Bennium philosophy is the only one which has succeeded in vindic ting this principle. It is the embodiment of Spirit itself. It operates on the assumption that stupenti "learn by doin" and, carrying out the full implicat ons of this great Progressive principle, h s reached a point in its development where action and being have become synonymous. These bodies which you see here lying before you are testimone of this fact. The educational activity which the stupenti engage in in the spring term is a form of sun worship, designed to dull the common and mundane senses and heighten the precious sensibilities. Many of the women have fallen into a swoon, which you will notice by the fact that their mouths are open. This means th t the sun has penetrated their brains and is performing the process of Enlightenment. It is a version of Osmosis and is achieved only through a most intense period of concentration and introspection. The catalogue here calls the process "Solar Reflection in the Photosynthetic Style". The beads of perspiration about the foreheads and over the upper lips of the stupenti is another indication of the rigor of this approach. If you look closely, you will see how remarkably skinny the bodies are. Notice the greyness and near transparency of the skin, listen to the rattling of the bones as the bodies move and to the groaning and gurgling of their bloated bellies. It is music to the Master Mind, for here they starve the stomach to feed the sould, which is the first aim of so aristocratic and expensive and education.

Beastbara-none is finding it difficult to concentrate and that is why you see her sitting up, angrily shouting "dabble! Dabble! Dabble!". And Anathema, who just raised her head and declared "I make emotion/, Th t Bennium by now should have an Ocean!" offers an example of the kinds of interdisciplinary work th t can be done in Benniums one course program--namely an intermingling of poetry and politics.

In the winter we find a different scene, for th t is the season of turning inward. As the autumn winds begin to howl and blow, the stupent bodies grow dry and shrivelled and gradually begin to raise themselves to their hands and knees. Then on the Lawn are arms and

legs and voices all confused as the stupenti are tossed on top of one another like brittle leaves and swept screaming into the hollow wooden houses that border on the Commons Lawn. The houses are without furniture for the purpose of being able to accomodate so large a number of stupenti. In the corners and centers of the rooms, on the rafters, in the closets, in the Johns, the stupenti hover together in the unheated and unlit houses where they are to be initiated into the realms of chaotic Profundity and primeval Night. From huge loudspeakers in one of the houses, heavy electronic sounds begin to emanate. They groan, they throb, they pound and the walls of the building shake with the vibrations. The stupenti heads begin to nod. Creepina inhales the smoky vapours of anopiate and passes the pipe to Odora who passes it to Morticia, and so on. A high pitched droan pierces through the hallways, and agonized voices are heard insanelly chanting indistinguishable phrases in passionate repetition. The momentum builds, the volume mounts, and all sounds seem drowned in the pulsating rhythm and all-encompassing noise. The stupenti heads shake, wobble, roll about. Crumabell raises the pipe to her mouth and with a dreadful, cucking sound reaches a climax of endless inhalation. The tension subsides, and limp bodies wallow in a Chaos of hair, eyes, Oblivion and vomit.

In the smoke-filled rooms of another house, the stupenti engage in that part of the internal pressure program that involves becoming very intense. Isolating herself from the other stupent as best she can, for the purposes of meditation, each stupent tries to execute her Ideas by a tremendous act of Will. With infernal fury Belladonna's mind rages. Her face grows grey and haggard. Her hair is matted and messed. Large shadows encircle her eyes. She strains and pushes til her face is red, but she cannot articulate a thought. She is left to her painful brooding until finally she is sent to the chemical laboratories where she is diagnosed as having a not uncommon disease at Bennium called Mental Constipation. This disease is almost inevitably complicated with another disorder known as Verbal Diarrhea which is a variation of Delirium and involves a High fever and mush talking of nonsense. It is caused generally by overwork resulting from a too severe thwarting of the sense with "black beauties" which are female demons called upon by the stupenti to induce sleeplessness. The victim of the disease is always rewarded by the deep praise and admiration of the other stupenti. It is often a source of amusement for the stupent body to engage in contests to see how long one who has contracted the disease is capable of sustaining her condition of utter Confusion, for stupenti attach mush status to self-indulgent neuroses.

It is worthy of note that all the educational advances that Bennium College has made over the past thirty-one years are the results of much hard work and sacrifice. They were in fact born out of grave Crisis--a Crisis that would never have had so stupendous an outcome if it had not been for the bold and creative imaginations that were responsible for working out the dismal situation. It was in the year 1969 that the Crisis hit the campus. Strangely enough, the school that had placed itself, or so it thought at the time, so marvelously above monetary and other mundane matters, was suddenly threatened with financial ruin. For years the college had run on so fine a balance of high tuitions paid by parenti and intellectual extravagance on the part of stupenti that no one ever really knew that this process was at work, so smoothly did the dynamics of the System run--the bottomless source of the campus Vault continuously feeding into the operation of stupenti minds as if Nature had ordained it. No one knew how that System began--no one even knew, as I already pointed out, that it existed until finally in that fateful year it began to manifest its imperfections. All of a sudden the inhabitants of the campus were rudely awakened one morning by the harsh light of Reality and had no choice but to rub the sleep from their eyes with their angry little fists and confront the brutal Fact. I cannot stress how cruel was the Revelation to those innocent minds. Understandably, it threw the campus into a terrible tizzy of despair. Truly they were tempted to yield to Reality's demands and relinquish their High ideals, which is the common fate of weak characters and uningenious minds thrown into the depths of Poverty. Some suggested that they increase the size of classes, thereby cutting down on the amount of courses teachers have to be paid for teaching and increasing the amount of incoming tuitions. The intimacy of the stupent-teacher relationship had always been one of Bennium's main features of attraction, but now that the unfortunate turn of events called the

principles on which it was based into question, they were willing to give it up just as if it never existed. Their belief in the principles of Individuality, academic Freedom and High intellectual pursuits divorced from the trivialities of Facts, Dates, finances and future concerns had been challenged. Their whole philosophy of Life was being threatened, and they saw no way out of their predicament. They simply would have to conform to the horrors prevalent throughout the other universities of the land condoning the use of Statistics, the reading of Secondary Sources, the institution of the Lecture, the Evil of Professionalism and the acknowledgment of the phenomenon of a Body of accumulated Knowledge. It sickened them to think of learning as something that could be contained in the squirming squiggles on a pock-marked page, folded and stuffed in somebody's pocket for future reference. If they had already gone so far as to rely on the dollar as a means of sustaining themselves (and oh, the agony of the thought that for so long they had remained blind to their own miserable vices!) then they certainly could not presume to anything more than a program of marks and required courses and well-rounded programs that open the mind to the Demons of Breadth, Background, Scope in learning, factual History, a sense of Continuity and Coherence and other vices of Babbling and Dilletantism. If they, like others, were vulnerable to the slings and arrows of outrageous Poverty, then, like the Poor, they must lower themselves to the more vulgar forms of living. Oh! Wretched is the state of Man, they thought when he discovers finally that no matter how endowed with Virtue, Honor and Truth, he must needs still be endowed with Cash! To realize of a sudden, that despite the refinements of Culture and High thinking, all men in Society are Poor and that Society itself is the perpetuation of that wretchedness!

Such was the despair of the stupenti at the first dawning of their Crisis, but not for long were they left tormented by their thoughts of hopelessness. For suddenly before the crowd arose Ned Patan, the Prime Minister of the college at that time. High on a tarnished throne now far outworn, he sat, holding in his hands the blueprints for the expansion of the beloved institution that was now crumbling before his eyes. On seeing that he was about to speak, the stupenti, who had been tearing their hair in despair, weeping, groaning in frenzy, throwing tantrums and sobbing, fell silent. And so Ned began.

Stupenti! Do not give yourselves up for lost! If, until now, our scheme has failed in operation, this does not mean that our first principles no longer hold promise. You may by now already have heard of a secret cave which has been discovered to have been hidden in our foundations and the defectiveness of which is known to be the source of our misfortunes. Here, in the campus Vault, the Ledgers and Budgets of the school are entombed. Rules and Regulations, Rhyme and Reason, Grade, Examinations, Course Structures, Deadlines and other Demons have been lurking there all along. While we have been virtuously devoting ourselves to the Higher pursuits of learning, underground arteries leading to this Vault have been pumping foul Hypocrisy into our System! Shall we, because we have been mistaken once, give up all we have ever worked for and throw open our doors to these dreadful Forms? No, I say! We must hold to our experimental Ideals, and though our experiment fails, must retain the Privilege of making mistakes. We shall not lower ourselves to learn from any Lesson! Hence I come to you, Stupenti, to announce my journey to the campus Vault. In my descent, I hope to discover by what irregularity these hitherto artfully hidden caverns have been brought to our attention, what parasite perhaps has dried our source of life (vicious as that source is). By knowing finally the truth about our operation, we then may consult how we can repair our loss and overcome our dire calamity. Thus I come to you to ask for your support on this terrible journey as well as for your patience, so that I may obtain whatever information is necessary for a proper consideration of our situation before we enact any radical changes in policy. Thus Ned Patan spoke, and the grateful stupenti cheered him on as he descended his throne and walked through the crowd to the far end of the Common's Lawn, where at last he disappeared over the edge. Down he descended through hollow passageways and was blown by a howling wind through dark and mazy corridors. The walls throbbed like a pulse, but no substance moved through those underground arteries but poor Ned who was tossed and tumbled by the relentless wind and left panting and bewildered at the huge door of the Vault. The door was locked, but Ned knew the combination. (He had known about the Vault all along, but since it did not seem to be relevant to the stupenti's education, he had never bothered to mention it.) When he opened the door and entered the yawning stomach of Bennium,

he saw immediately that something was not right. The energetic little demons of Masculine Rationality who were usually hard at work pumping Life into the arteries of the college and feeding its operation, sat limp and forlorn at their posts. Rules and Regulations, usually pert, proper, and erect, were obscenely sprawled about the floor. Reason, always cool, calm and collected, lay in bed, nervously clutching a thermometer in its mouth and looking flushed and feverish. Sets of standards standing about in groups were sinking lower and lower with fatigue. Ned examined the grave conditions with desperate eyes. Some very foul infection must be draining these creatures of their health and energy, he thought, and just as he thought it, a hoarde of swarming Budgetary Options swooped down upon his head from an ulcerous cavity that was growing directly above him. Down from the spacious wound the aerial creatures came, smothering him with their numbers, fluttering their wings in his face. Ned looked up at the giant Dome that reared its head like a Huge Inflation, sucking the Life out of the Vault like an Eternal Vacuum. On its corner stone the name Ned Patan was engraved in mortar. Roaring and rumbling, it belched and spat dirt upward. A huge steam shovel impiously ransacked the bowels of the earth, leaving the Vault with a gaping gut and removing its precious bane. And all the while the Options hissed at Ned and tortured him with taunts and jeers. Option 4433 alighted on his head and whispered in his ear a million times over "science, science, science, science." 5533 pointed at him and poked him with its pinions, and all the other Options swarmed about his feet and under his arms like maggots, laughing a hideous laugh.

On misery! thought Ned. What proud imagination had led me to believe that I might construct the Cave of Science so close above this Vault that my own mighty shovels have opened it to the light? All hell has broken loose, and I am the very author of my ruin! Already the stupenti have complained that they cannot hear their teachers for the din of the construction, but I had not thought I would live to be heckled for this! But hold! As yet the stupenti have not seen the source of their affliction. Patiently they await my return and the report of what I have seen. If my wits are still about me as they were when I first conceived this wild construction, then, if not money, at least my Reputation and dear Bennium's will be saved. I go at once to offer my report. So thought Ned and tore himself from the troublesome Options to reascend onto the Common's Lawn.

The stupenti, hovering about on the Lawn, and hanging their heads over the edge of the precipice where Ned had descended, pantingly anticipated their Prime Ministrator's return, like thirsty dogs on the bank of a rippling stream which their long tongues cannot reach. Finally he ascended, tattered and torn by his hassle with the Options, and the stupenti, with some effort, pulled him back onto the Lawn, where he strode heroically toward his throne, the throngs of hairy mongrels following close upon his heel. Reaching his seat, he turned and spoke.

Fear not, my friends! Bennium will be saved! And your purpose in coming here to avoid the blinding and changing light of Reality shall be fulfilled. If we can not find reinforcement in hope, then at least we may find resolution in despair. On my journey to the bottom of the Vault, I did achieve my purpose, which was to learn the cause of our misfortune. It is a Test, Stupenti! Yes, I say, a Test of our very Virtue imposed on us by the Almighty. In the dark caverns of the campus, I was assaulted by an army of Optins, each one representing an alternative remedy for our situation, each asking to be worshipped by us. Each proposes a raise in tuitions paid by Parenti, but each demands as well a reorganization of curriculum. Option 4444 proposes that we do away with Counseling and retain our Four Course Norm, Option 4433 that we do away with some Counseling and take only Three Courses in our last two years, Option 5333 that we take Five Courses in our first year and Three in the remaining three, and so on. We are confronted by an infinite number of choices. We may, as earlier you despaired of, join the rest of Society in becoming a highly Bureaucratized institution and raise ourselves from the status of feeling Animals to the Abstract level of Statistics. Or we may choose one of the aforementioned Options as our God and regain our previous financial Balance. But do not be deceived, Stupenti! This Crisis is not merely a Test of our abilities to make random desesion. It is a Temptation! For, if we choose an Option, whichever it may be, what are we doing but compromising ourselves with Reality and the Present corrupt state of Society as we unwittingly have done in the Past? We were innocent then, for

then we were blind. But now, now we should know better. If we accept any of these Options, we have lost our purity and innocence forever. There is only one way to regain our innocence and remain unborn into the evils of the world, and that is to remain truly Progressive. Let us not lower ourselves to the social Forms that merely point toward a better Future. Let us construct that future now! By hurling us into this Crisis, the Almighty has revealed to us the gross Reality that is in our System and has thereby given us a chance to get it out. Grab the opportunity, Comrades, and you will find immediate gratification! To eliminate one Course is but a half-hearted solution to our problem. It can only prepare us for another Crisis of the sort we suffer now. If we are truly Progressive, what need do we have of Society at all? Let us leave the world behind! If we are truly experimental, then let us take risks in the manner that term demands of us. Jump with me into the adventurous sea of the Future as I have delved into the elemental darkness of the campus Vault, where at last I found the Truth. Our salvation, Stupenti, depends not on how we change, but on the extent to which we may become more of what we are--and the ultimate of what we aspire to be. Therefore do I urge the institution of the ONE COURSE program. ONE. There is Nothing in the world like the number ONE. The ONE and only of Absolute Perfection. Not only shall our educational policy then be Modern, but it shall be singularly so! Let us not stand and, out of fear, dally in conservative considerations, but let us move forward with gusto! If until this Crisis came upon us, Bennium has been our Paradise, then the Bennium of the Future will be a Paradise happier far. For it will be the true Higher education.

Thus spoke Ned, and the stupenti fell into roars of ecstatic applause and laughter and ran about kissing one another and weeping for joy and tearing at their hair and straining to touch their great Ministrator with clawing hands and faces tormented with Love. Not since Ceasar, Napoleon or Lennon had any leader inspired so enthusiastic a response in his following. When at long last the noise subsided, Ned resumed.

Stupenti, much remains yet to be done. The achievement of our ends must involve a great sacrifice. We have many fine Books, Supplies and Professors here who have become a financial burden. We must act with no priorities. Fetch them as quickly as you can and bring them to the altar which, in the meantime, I will lead some of the women to the Mountain to build.

Thus did the stupenti disperse as best they could, being as numerous as they were. They sped as if the devil had possessed them or they had drunk some magic potion to recover them from their normal state of lethargy. Madly they rampaged the buildings, tearing the Books from the shelves, seizing Chairs and Tables and Chalk, ravaging the kitchen for every last morsel of Food, and lassoing their Teachers who were not yet sure what was happening to them. Literally, they took everything they could lay their hands on and, in hoardes, carried these treasures to the altar on the Mount, where they danced insanely about, striking the most extravagant postures, flinging their long hair to the sky. All the great Minds from Plato to Aristotle, Shakespeare, Milton, Einstein, Dewey, were brought in volumes and the handful of great Contemporaries who were the Faculti of that highly renowned college were delivered up. Then did the maenads begin to rend the pages from the Books, throwing them in a heap of Confusion, much as their contents were heaped in the stupenti minds. Then, as the pyre was lit and the printed pages went up in smoke, the stupenti proceeded to tear apart their Teachers limb from limb and to devour them alive, experiencing at once a mixture of supreme exaltation and supreme repulsion; after which they gorged themselves on the rations stolen from the kitchen. In the background, stupenti voices could be heard chanting

Mine eyes have seen the Glory of the burning of the school.
We have murdered every Teacher we have broken every Rule.
We have fought them in the office, we have fought them in the hall.
Our Truth goes marching on!

And Ned spoke into the fire.

Go. Purified by flames ascend the sky. From this day on we shall live as true Intellectuals, unprofaned by Budgetary concerns. Go, vicious Food that has made gluttons of us all and summon up spare Fast that diets with the gods. Go, Tables, Chairs and vile Conveniences that infect us with a comfortable disease and, in the name of the Spirit, let us suffer. And lastly do we sacrifice our own dear Reasoning Faculti. Be gone, beloved Instructors, but do not

bid farewell, for by divine Incorporation we make you a part of ourselves, forever to preside over our minds, melted down as in a crucible into one lump of liquid Virtue and Intelligence--bodiless and therefore immortal. Better to rest at Bennium than to work at New Hades State, I say! And thus we are all united--firm and formidably at ONE with ourselves and our Ideals.

You have just read the record of a televised tour of Bennium that took place in the year 2000. A follow up study of the college reports that the school ran smoothly on its new program for quite some time before the people of the town surrounding the campus became incensed by the student's predisposition to pilfer food from their homes. The consequent reinstitution of dining facilities in the college and the small fee thereby necessitated, brought Bennium, in the year 2010, to its second financial Crisis. The school found a corrective for this calamity by limiting itself beyond a single Course to a single Class, which graduated in the year 2012, one year after the sad death of their Prime Ministrator. Information received from various parts of the country reports that college graduates holding Bennium degrees can be identified by the Fact that they KNOW NOTHING. Tourists in New Bengland still can visit Bennium College cradled in the arms of the Verminn Mountains, where the wind whistles through the empty houses that border on the Commons Lawn, and the Cave of Science stands with NED PATAN engraved on its cornerstone.